

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

May 13, 2021

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:00pm by Superintendent Emily Parks. Also present were: Charles Donahue, Carol Lewis, Anthony Mullin, Amanda Phillips, and Maya Plotkin. Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom, and Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Ms. Parks recognized the live stream of the meeting, which was provided for real-time, public access to the activities of the School Committee. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the meeting via the Internet at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live. Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on their platforms.

Reorganization of the School Committee

The School Committee reorganizes at its first regular meeting following Town Meeting.

Vote to Elect Chairperson

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to elect Maya Plotkin as Chairperson. Seconded by Tony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Maya Plotkin assumed control of the meeting as Chair.

Vote to Elect Vice Chairperson

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to elect Charlie Donahue as Vice Chair. Seconded by Carol Lewis.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Vote to Elect Clerk

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to elect Anthony Mullin as Clerk. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with Executive Order of Massachusetts Governor, March 12, 2020

Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Maya Plotkin thanked Carol Lewis for her service as Committee Chairperson over the past year. The other members echoed her sentiments.

Superintendent's Report

WPS COVID-19 Data

The presentation began with a chart showing the COVID-19 case count, the average daily incidence rate, and the percent positivity over time.

Data was shared:

- 272 positive cases (students and staff) to date this school year
- 2,450 students and staff tracked by the COVID-19 Monitoring and Response Team (positive cases, close contact, travel, symptomatic)
- 700 consultations

Student positive cases by month:

- September: 0.4%
- October: 3.4%
- November: 6.9%
- December: 14.6%
- January: 40.8%
- February: 10.7%
- March: 8.2%
- April: 13.3%
- May (to date): 1.7%

Recent quarantines for the period of May 13 are ten students and one staff.

Updated Guidance regarding Quarantines

- Definition of "close contact" remains the same (i.e., within six feet for fifteen minutes or more cumulatively, even when masked)
- Only close contacts within three feet need to quarantine
- Other close contacts (3-6 feet) do not need to quarantine as long as they remain symptom-free

Student COVID Testing Program: Percentage of Students Registered

The percentage of students registered for the period of May 13 are:

- Preschool: 60%
- Elementary: 55%
 - Deerfield: 57%
 - Downey: 40%
 - Hanlon: 52%
 - Martha Jones: 60%
 - Sheehan: 55%
- Middle School: 51%
- High School: 58%

Pool Testing Update

- State announced that it will continue to fund pool testing through the end of August
- The district will continue the pool testing for students and staff in summer programs
- Staff testing participation continues to decline as staff members are fully vaccinated
- Participating in pool testing or producing a negative PCR test is a requirement for attendance at Friday's prom. (98% of attendees were tested through our pool testing program)

MCAS Update

MCAS testing has already begun. The State has indicated that it will be suspending the usual accountability system, however. Districts are required to administer the MCAS both to in-person and to fully remote students. Fully remote students in grades 3-8 will test at home with the district providing virtual proctors. A remote testing option is not available at the high school.

Elementary: MCAS will be administered in English language arts and in math in grades 3, 4, and 5. Grade 5 students will also take science. The number of sessions has been reduced from two to one per subject area.

Middle School: MCAS will be administered in English language arts and in math in grades 6, 7, and 8. Grade 8 students will also take science. As with elementary, the number of sessions has been reduced to one per subject area.

High School: In Massachusetts, students are required to pass the MCAS in English language arts, math, and science in order to achieve a “competency determination” and be eligible for a diploma. The typical testing of tenth grade students in English language arts and math; and ninth grade students in science will take place this spring. There has been no reduction in the number of test sessions.

Current eleventh grade students did not take MCAS last spring due to the closure. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) had previously waived the science requirement for those students, but not English language arts and math. DESE recently announced that both the English language arts and math MCAS will also be waived for this year’s juniors. The State will be providing other criteria by which students can demonstrate that they have met the competency determination.

Individual MCAS results are also used for additional purposes at the high school level, including eligibility for scholarship. Therefore, while not required for the Class of 2022, they have the option to participate in MCAS testing. Approximately 85 juniors have chosen to participate.

The State has not provided a remote test option at the high school level. Students must attend school on the testing dates or defer taking the test until the retesting period next school year.

Superintendent Parks also reported that the Martha Jones School experienced a power outage during MCAS testing this week. Grade 5 students were unable to complete their English language arts testing session. After consulting with DESE, the session was postponed until later in the week and students were able to resume their work as it was saved in progress.

End-of-year and Transition Events

Grade 5

Collaboration with Hale:

- Hale facilitators at schools will lead team-building challenges for grade 5 students in small groups
- Common experience across schools
- Will result in a collaborative product from all students in the grade that will greet them in the fall at TMS

Orientation to Thurston Middle School:

- Middle School Principal and Counselor will visit with grade 5 students at each elementary school
- Grade 5 students and their parents will visit Thurston on Wednesday afternoons

Grade 8

End-of-year Celebration:

- June 11: Field day

- June 14: Ice cream truck
- June 15: BBQ and yearbook signing
- June 16: Moving-up Ceremony on Flahive Field

Orientation activities:

- Video welcome and orientation from High School Principal
- In-person visit for tours of high school
- In-person, outdoor breakout groups hosted by Westwood Ambassadors (High School students)

High School

All grades will have PTO-sponsored ice cream socials.

For seniors:

- Senior Week lawn games and picnic
- (Hopefully) Student musical performances
- Senior Sunset
- All-Night Graduation Party

Other Reports

- Assistant Superintendent Borchers was named secretary for the Massachusetts Partnership for Diversity in Education
- Tom Millett was named High School Dean of Students. He is currently the Dean at Excel Academy in East Boston

Public Comment

Members of the public were able to comment during public participation via Zoom.

Brian Camenker of University Avenue spoke in opposition of the district's work for diversity, equity, and inclusion, referring to the curriculum as "marxist." He expressed concern over replacing normal coursework at the secondary level and recommended it be optional for students.

Committee member Amanda Phillips responded that there are many in this community that support this work and many that feel they are not included. She is supportive of this work.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street thanked the Committee for its work steering the community through a difficult and stressful school year.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive recommended that the administration plan for pre-pandemic normalcy in the fall. She requested that, given recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, that the School Committee not move forward with a revised mask policy.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Building Projects Update

MSBA Board Vote

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) held its board meeting on Wednesday. They voted to approve the Hanlon-Deerfield project and issue a grant, subject to Town Meeting approval, for up to \$18,235,725.

Hanlon-Deerfield Summer Work

Bridge funding on the Hanlon-Deerfield project passed at Town Meeting, allowing for design development work to continue through the summer, ahead of the Fall Town vote.

Sheehan Study and Statement of Interest Submission

The School Committee previously presented a timeline on addressing capital needs at the Sheehan School. Initially, the School Committee chose not to pursue MSBA funding as it was unlikely to be

accepted given that the Town is in the process for the Hanlon-Deerfield project. Additionally, the timetable for submission did not allow adequate time for district staff to complete a statement of interest, given the work of reopening schools. However, the MSBA has since delayed the submission deadline to the end of June. While the likelihood of being accepted into the MSBA program is low, the district has the resources to try. A response is anticipated in December. This will not delay the proposed timeline for Sheehan.

COVID-19 Advisory Group Update

Anthony Mullin reported. Metrics are improving for the Commonwealth and Westwood's data reflects this as well. The Advisory Group is thinking ahead to the fall.

Other Liaison Reports

Anthony Mullin reported that the All Night Graduation Party is seeking more volunteers. He asked members of the community to consider volunteering.

Amanda Phillips reported that the Special Education Parent Advisory Council is launching a language-based learning differences support group beginning next week. The Special Olympics' Young Athletes Program is launching later this month.

Charles Donahue reported on the Testing Collaborative and advised that Amanda Fairbanks, the district's COVID-19 Student Testing Coordinator is attending the meetings now. He recommended that the School Committee invite Amanda to a future meeting to provide an update.

Chair Maya Plotkin reminded the Committee of the Superintendent's evaluation process. In Massachusetts, Superintendents are required to have goals in professional practice, student learning, and two district improvement goals. The School Committee approved these goals in the fall. Typically they are aligned with the strategy for district improvement. This year, however, they were largely written to address this year's unique needs. Each is aligned with areas on the model rubric.

The Superintendent kept the School Committee apprised of her work on these goals. The School Committee now needs to provide comments. In addition to assessing, the School Committee needs to provide feedback and ratings on instructional leadership, management and operations, family and community engagement, and professional culture. The Superintendent will prepare a self-assessment. While it is difficult to comment on everything, Maya Plotkin requested that feedback be focused on accomplishments and priorities. Members were asked to provide input to Carol Lewis and Tony Mullin, who will compile this input and prepare an evaluation for the June meeting.

Discussion Items

Student Academic Status and Recovery

An update on some of the work proposed to assess where students' skills are at the end of this year and to provide summer programming and intervention in the fall was presented.

Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers provided an update on general education.

Summer Programming – General Education

The objective of elementary summer support for 2021 is to support skill development for students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Early Grades Literacy:

- Students entering grades 1-3
- Critical years for foundational literacy skills
- Data from fall and spring assessments
- In-person program
 - Four weeks in July, Monday through Thursday, half-day program from 8:30am-11:30am
- Focus on phonics, decoding, sight words, reading comprehension, and writing

- Enrichment activities

Math Kickstart Program

- Students entering grades 4-6
- Support for development of skills needed for complex problems
- Data from end-of-year assessment (early June)
- Virtual program
 - Ninety minutes each weekday, August 16-27
- Focus areas:
 - Grade 4: Multiplication, focusing on number relationships
 - Grade 5: Equal groups, multiplication, and fractions
 - Grade 6: Multiplication and division review, operating with fractions and decimals

The program will be funded through the district's operating budget.

Extended School Year (Special Education)

Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom reported.

Themes for 2021:

- Connection
- Routine
- Stability and growth
- Flexibility: More students/multiple modalities

Extended School Year is traditionally focused on special education services for:

- Recoupment of skills
- COVID compensatory services
- Unique situations requiring additional support

Services can still be provided remotely. In addition, some meetings and testing may take place over the summer.

217 students have been offered in-person services (100 last year)

- 17 Preschool (7 last year)
- 117 elementary (65 last year)
- 59 middle school (11 last year)
- 24 High School/Transition (17 last year)

Not all that are offered choose to attend.

Extended School Year is staffed by approximately 93 people. (81 last year)

- Preschool: 6
- Elementary: 61
- Middle School: 12
- High School/Transition: 14

A remote option of Extended School Year will be offered as well.

Extended School Year will take place throughout the district:

- Downey: All entering Kindergarten through grade 5 programs
- High School/Preschool: Preschool, Middle School, High School, and transition programs
- Programming of 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 weeks will take place between June 28 and August 20
- A gradual resumption of in-home ABA services will occur from July through September

The keys to success include:

- Social distancing using most current guidelines for school and transportation
- Hand washing/hygiene
- Mask wearing

- Student and staff testing/COVID Team tracking
- Daily cleaning procedures and personal protective equipment

Middle School Intervention Model

Middle School Principal Michael Redmon presented.

As part of Principal Redmon's entry plan, there was a question: How do we create an intervention model/opportunities for students to receive extra support within general education or extension. The middle school team wanted to explore this question in depth.

What is Intervention:

- A model that assesses students' mastery of skills, identifies areas in need of further development or extension, and then provides differentiated learning experiences (often in small groups) to provide targeted...

This will be achieved at the middle school via:

- A 45-minute "What I Need" (WIN) period for all students
- Will use and analyze data in collaborative work times
- Staffing changes (i.e., literacy specialists, math specialists, reading specialists)

The Committee discussed the middle school schedule and the structure for student interventions.

Building Use 2021-2022

Due to the pandemic, the use of school facilities by outside parties was not allowed this school year. The district is recommending the full resumption of building use for the 2021-2022 school year. There will be no change to the rental and event fee charges. Custodial rates, determined by the agreement between the School Committee and SEIU Local will be adjusted to reflect the contract currently in place.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation. Additionally, Tony Mullin asked that a look at the economics of building use be analyzed for a future meeting.

Planning for 2021-2022

The district's leadership team will be spending a day in June to debrief the past year and to discuss strategic priorities and goals for the year ahead.

Information from DESE on expectations and requirements for next school year is forthcoming. The COVID Medical Advisory Group is providing a sense of the health and safety issues that should be anticipated in the fall. Questions do remain. These include whether the COVID Monitoring and Response Team will need to be in place, whether the student pool testing program should continue, and adjustments to the mask policy.

How to support students and their siblings who, due to medical circumstances, will need to continue to require fully remote learning in the fall, is an important question. Based on preliminary conversations with DESE, it is unlikely that districts will be able to provide a fully remote option to students except in cases of medical accommodation. It is also likely that districts will be obligated to use fully remote academic programs approved for virtual learning by the state. Westwood, as a member of the TEC collaborative, has historically provided access to virtual classes through TECCA, a chartered virtual academy. As a member district, Westwood's students take classes through TECCA, but remain enrolled as district students. Special education services continue to be provided directly through the district as well. It is hoped that DESE will allow Westwood to leverage this partnership to support fully remote students in the fall.

Bus ridership is being analyzed to determine whether Deerfield can be kept on the same schedule as the other four elementary schools.

Elementary enrollment is being looked at closely. In the approved budget, 3.0 FTE elementary general education teachers are unassigned. It is clear now, however, that at least one additional teacher will be

needed at elementary. The middle school's scheduling model has created a 1.0 FTE position that could be reallocated to elementary. Superintendent Parks recommends moving the position to elementary, which is cost-neutral.

First reading of Revised Policy EBCFA: Face Masks

The School Committee's mask policy originally had language requiring masks to be worn while on school grounds, with no exceptions for playing fields. This was consistent with State guidance at the time. The revision now includes language whereby masks are not required on school grounds while outdoors, but "must be worn on school grounds when social distancing is not observed or at large gatherings or events."

The Committee reviewed the policy and agreed to continue and make any further revisions as needed. The second reading of the policy will take place at next month's meeting.

Action Items

Vote to Submit Statement of Interest for the Sheehan School to the Massachusetts School Building Authority

Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste read the resolution aloud:

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on May 13, 2021, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the School Committee of Westwood, Massachusetts, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated June 25, 2021 for the Sheehan Elementary School, located at 549 Pond Street, Westwood, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future:

Priority 5: Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility; and

Priority 7: Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements;

and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept this vote. Seconded by Carol Lewis.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Annual Vote on School Choice

School Choice came from the Education Reform Act of 1993, which allows non-resident students to choose where they attend school unless the district opts out. Westwood has historically opted out. Chair Maya Plotkin read the resolution aloud:

WHEREAS the Educational Reform Act of 1993 requires that the enrollment of non-resident students under the School Choice provision unless the Committee votes by June 1 not to participate, and

WHEREAS the School Choice provision reallocates funds from the sending district and awards such funds to the receiving district, and

WHEREAS the maximum reimbursement allowed by the School Choice provision is less than Westwood's per pupil expenditure, which means Westwood Public Schools would be required to subsidize each choice student, and

WHEREAS once Westwood accepts a choice student, Westwood must keep such student through graduation, regardless of whether Westwood's demographic situation has changed, and

WHEREAS it is likely that a number of students will return to their sending districts or otherwise leave Westwood, thus creating a potential income loss, now hereby be it

RESOLVED that the Westwood School Committee respectfully declines to participate in the School Choice Program; provided, however, that if surrounding school districts subsequently, and prior to June 1, decide to accept the provisions of School Choice, the Westwood School Committee reserves the right to do likewise in order to protect its fiduciary interests in this matter.

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to accept this vote. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of Revised Policy JFB – Intra-District Transfer Policy

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve revised policy JFB – Intra-District Transfer Policy. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes
Maya Plotkin: Yes
Charles Donahue: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of April 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of April 8, 2021. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of May 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of May 4, 2021. Seconded by Charles Donahue.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: **Yes**
Maya Plotkin: **Yes**
Charles Donahue: **Yes**
Anthony Mullin: **Yes**
Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of April 8, 2021 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Draft meeting minutes of May 4, 2021 for the Committee’s review and approval

- Elementary Summer Support 2021 slideshow
- End-of-year and Transition Events slideshow, dated May 13, 2021
- Extended School Year (ESY) 2021 slideshow
- Memo from A. Borchers to E. Parks, A. Hanscom, and L. Jn-baptiste regarding Summer Programming in Special Education, dated May 6, 2021
- Memo from L. Jn-baptiste to School Committee regarding Use of School Facilities, dated May 14, 2021
- Memo from E. Parks to School Committee regarding MCAS Update, dated May 7, 2021
- Memo from E. Parks to School Committee regarding Planning for 2021-2022, dated May 7, 2021
- Memo from M. Redmon to School Committee and E. Parks regarding TMS Intervention Model, 2021-2022, dated May 7, 2021
- Middle School intervention model, 2021-2022 slideshow
- Revised Policy JFB – Intra-District Transfer Policy for the Committee’s final review and approval
- Revised Policy EBCFA – Face Masks for the Committee’s discussion
- School Choice Vote Resolution
- Statement of Interest Vote Resolution
- WPS COVID-19 Data, dated May 6, 2021